

“Pronoun--They”

What did “they” influence you to do that you would not have done if “they” hadn’t been around? Let that statement marinate for a second. What did “they” influence you to do that you would not have done if “they” hadn’t been around?

You’re talking to somebody and he comes to a point where he says, “They have been coming to me,” or “They feel,” or “They believe....” I love to ask the question that no one ever asks. “Who are they?” “They.” “Them?” “Them. Yeah, those.” “Whose?” “I don’t know.”

Who are they? They are a few who seem like everybody in our mind. The sway of they. The power of this pronoun. It seems so benign. It seems like it’s no big deal, but “they” carry some serious weight.

Example: The lists that are always coming out. What’s hot and what’s not? What’s in style; what’s out of style? Who comes up with all that? When we read it, we think, “Oh, the masses say that. That’s what everybody’s saying.” No, no, it’s not everybody. It’s just a few. “They say.... they feel.... they believe.... So I’d better buy that, drive that, do that because of they.” The sway of they.

“They” is powerful. They are always speaking stuff into our lives. But here’s the question: **Are you listening to the right “they” or the wrong “they”?**

Oh, and yes, there is a right they. What did the **right** “they” influence you to do that you would not have done if they hadn’t been around? What did the **wrong** “they” influence you to do that you would not have done if they hadn’t been around? Those are some deep questions, penetrating questions.

If we could see what God wants to do in our lives we wouldn’t believe it. God is that awesome. He’s that’s amazing. He has some giant stuff for us to do by his power and by his mercy. But we have got to think about they. The sway of they. The wrong they will keep you in the fray and the right they will keep you above the fray. Who are they? Have you ever tried to chase down they?

To help us think about they let’s think about Nehemiah. We talked about him earlier in the year when we talked about endurance. But he’s also a good case study of the power of they. Nehemiah’s story is in the Old Testament and knew about the sway of they because Nehemiah did something that they said could not be done. Nehemiah had a cush job in the Persian government. He gets word that the walls of his home city of Jerusalem have been destroyed. He asked permission from the king to leave and to rebuild the city walls around Jerusalem.

Now that seems weird to us because we’re thinking, “Okay, what’s the big deal about city walls? Who needs city walls? Why are city walls important?” Well, in our day they’re not. But back in **the** day, 440 B.C., city walls were huge because city walls provided protection. Also, in Jerusalem, they provided an opportunity for the Jews to worship in the temple. They could have protected worship in the temple.

So, Nehemiah asked for permission, and because the favor of God was on his life, the king of Persia gave him all this money and all the supplies to rebuild the city wall. If you have your Bibles, turn to Nehemiah 2. I’ll begin reading with Verses 19 and then I’ll go to Verse 20. Then I’ll skip over to Nehemiah 4 and we’ll close it down.

Nehemiah 2:19-20—Nehemiah has hit J-town, Jerusalem, and everybody knows why he’s there, to rebuild the city walls. He’s a man with a mission. First, he finds the right “they,” to begin working on this incredible project. But as soon as work begins, the wrong “they” show up.

Nehemiah 2:19, **“But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, ‘What is this thing you’re doing? Are you rebelling against the king?’”** That’s the wrong they mocking the right they.

“I mean, Nehemiah, what are you and your friends smoking? You’re going to try and rebuild the city walls? You can’t do that! Nehemiah, I thought you were in the Persian government? What’s up with all this stuff?”

And look at Verse 20, because Verse 20 talks about the right they. Nehemiah had the ability to surround himself with the right “they” and that’s what I need to do and that’s what you need to do.

Nehemiah 2:20 **“I answered them by saying, ‘The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it’” (Nehemiah 2:20, NIV).**

Again I'll tell you, if you could see what God wants to construct in your life you wouldn't believe it; nor would I. What does God want to do in your life? Maybe God wants to construct character in your life. Maybe he wants you to ratchet up commitment, or discipline, or integrity. Maybe it's in the relational world by building your marriage or building your kids. Maybe you are harboring a hurt. Maybe there's an addiction to overcome. Maybe there's an adventure live. And you know what God wants to construct. He's telling you right now. You feel it. You sense it. You know it. Maybe it's forgiveness. Maybe someone messed you around and maybe you're holding on to it. What does God want to construct in your life?

Here's a principle to get our heads around: Every time God constructs something in our lives, what happens? We're surrounded by the right they. But the wrong they always show up. The right they surrounds us; then the wrong they will come around and mock us and talk behind our back and abuse us. That's just the way it is.

Turn to Nehemiah 4:12. The right they are now going to get really intense with the wrong they. The right they talked to Nehemiah, and Nehemiah writes in Verse 12, **“Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, ‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us’” (Nehemiah 4:12, NIV).**

They, they, they, they. The sway of they, the wrong they. “Man they feel, they said, they believe; they've been coming to me, they're attacking us Nehemiah. They're big, they're bad, they're powerful.”

Look at Nehemiah 4:14, **“After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, ‘Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes’” (Nehemiah 4:14, NIV).**

The people were experiencing fear. What is fear? Ed Young says that fear is an acronym for **“Fear = False Evidence Appearing Real”** false evidence appearing real. That's what fear is. We all deal with fear. I have to deal with fear, so do you. But check this out: 365 times the Bible says, “Fear not.” 365 times! There's a “fear not” for every day of the year, isn't that awesome? We've got to face our fear. And so often we allow “they” to prey on us and to keep us locked and frozen in fear. God's message to us is, “Trust me and fear not.” The wrong they generate fear in us. The wrong they are usually just a few people, but they seem like a bunch. God knew this would happen so he's given us his word, “Do not be afraid, trust me, follow me.”

Now some of us have the right they in our lives, but we're not really listening to them. We're hearing them but not listening. Maybe you're a student, and the right they is maybe your parents. Or maybe it's the youth director or one of the volunteers in the youth ministry. You've got some people speaking truth, the right “they,” into your life but you don't want to listen. Listening is hearing with action. You say, “No, no. I'll do my own deal.” Hey, the right they know more than you do.

Maybe you're a single adult and you have the right they in your life and the right they is saying, “Don't connect with this person. Don't date this person.” But you're saying, “No, no, no. I know what I want.” But are you listening to the right they? Maybe the right they is speaking the truth about your marriage, but maybe you're saying, “No, no. I'll do what I want to do.” It's tragic to have the right they around you and not listen to them. It's very, very important to listen to the right they because the voice of the wrong they seems so loud. The evil one can make the wrong they sound like Fat Albert, “Hey, hey, hey!”

Let's get more specific here and look at the question: **What does the wrong they do?** How do you know if the wrong they are holding you hostage? And specifically you might be asking, “How can they mess me up?” Well, first of all, they can **keep us from our uniqueness.** Do you realize that you're unique, that you're one of a kind? Ed Young says that every one of us is a creative genius? Everyone here is a Picasso, a Renoir, a Monet. You're unique. No one has your laugh, your smile, your skill set, your abilities. It's been given to us by God himself. But somewhere along life's journey the world system just beats the uniqueness and the creativity out of us.

If I have a proper view of who I am, I see myself the way God sees me. But the moment I begin to try to appease and see myself as “they” see me, that’s when I mess up. That’s when I lose my uniqueness. That’s when I become one of them. And we spend so much time trying to please “they.” We worry about, “What did they say? What did they feel? What do they wear? What do they drive?” They, they, they, they, they. The sway of they.

The moment I move from seeing the way God sees me to the way they see me, I transition from being a vertical player to a horizontal pleaser. Life’s too short for that. When I die, God is not going to say, “Hey Aaron, why weren’t you more like so and so?” No, God’s going to say, “Aaron, why weren’t you more like Aaron?” This is probably the one of the weakest parts of my character. I try to please the wrong they and I sacrifice what God created me to be. That’s a journey of recovery for me. Don’t let the wrong they steal your uniqueness. Nehemiah knew he was unique. He knew his project was one of a kind. The right they knew that, too.

Well, what else can the wrong “they” do? The wrong they can **distract us**. Nehemiah found the right they while he was building the wall, but then the sidewalk supervisors showed up. Take a wild guess who they were? Sanballat, Tobiah and Gesham. And they began to talk trash and call them names and say this and say that, but what did Nehemiah do? I’ll tell you what he did not do.

He didn’t jump down from the wall and go toe-to-toe with them. He didn’t mud sling with them. He didn’t say, “Who are they? Well, let me find out. Who said that? Really? He did? She did? Well, I’ll find out. I’ll sit down and talk with them and have coffee at Starbuck’s and surely I can change them.”

He didn’t do that. Do you know what he did? He prayed and he stayed above the fray. The wrong they can seriously distract you. I’ve been in ministry 16 years now. Over the years it took a long time, but I’ve finally gotten pretty good at knowing the difference between a critic and a complainer. I appreciate critics because most of the time they are on mission, they’re on the team, they’re the right they and they care about the outcome and the big pictures. Complainers on the other hand the wrong they. Why? Because they don’t really care about the big picture or the mission. They really just want attention. Over the years I’ve gotten pretty good at sniffing out the difference. And if somebody is a complainer, I’m not going to let them distract me. Why? Because the mission is so important and life is too short. Nehemiah didn’t come down off the wall for the complainers, but he did for critics. One is focused on the mission and the other is not.

So, the wrong they can keep us from our uniqueness. They can distract us. And they can **keep us frozen in fear**. You don’t want to be frozen in fear, do you? I don’t. Face the fear. “But they might... But they could... But they should...”

And we stay frozen in fear with our feet cemented in the sidewalk instead of stepping up and stepping out and facing our fear. Maybe that’s what you need to do. Face your fear—false evidence appearing real. Start allowing God to build, and the right they will surround you and the wrong they will come out.

Well, you might be saying, “Okay, Aaron, the right they, who in the world are the right they?” **“Characteristics of the right “they”**” Begin to allow God to construct stuff in your life. Get involved with the local church and begin serving and you’ll see the right they. Who are the right they? **They are people with “He” in the middle--“tHEy”**. The right they always have “He” in the middle. “He” being Christ. They’re people who are not perfect, but they’re striving, struggling, pushing to follow Christ in the everydayness of their lives. In their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their work places, in their public lives, their private lives, and their inner lives. “He” is in the middle.

And the right **“Toughness”** they are tough. They’re tough. Don’t ever sit there and let anyone tell you, “Well, Christianity is for those people who need a crutch. It’s for the weak people and it’s for the quiche-eaters.” Karl Marx said that Christianity is the opiate of the people. That’s pathetic! If you say that, you don’t know what in the world you are talking about. Christianity happens to make people tough. I know. A week ago I was with a group of tough Christians in Nicaragua. The 8 of us slogged through ankle-deep mud, drove up jungle trails in monsoon rains, standing in the back of a beat-up pick up, faced all kinds of unknowns, and

languages barriers, and mosquitoes, and strange illnesses. Don't get me wrong. It was a great trip! But what I saw from those in our group was a toughness because of their faith, not some mamby, pamby, wimpy demeanor. And that says nothing of the toughness of the people who live there.

Jesus Christ was not some pale, frail, blue-eyed, skinny white boy. No, no, no. You have never met a man as tough as Jesus. You name the biggest, baddest guy out there in the athletic domain. That guy will pale in comparison to the toughness of Jesus Christ.

I'm not talking about mean here. I'm talking about being tough. Christianity makes men and women tough. You've got to be tough to bow the knee and make the tough decision to receive Christ, and we receive Jesus Christ our tough Lord and Savior who gives us the ability to be committed and to do the stuff. So the right they, man, they're going to be tough.

Having said all that, the right "**Tenderness**" they are tender. They'll be there to wipe a tear, offer a shoulder, help heal the wounds of life. The right they will be there to tend to you when you can't tend yourself. Jesus was tough, but he was also tender and gentle. The right they will have that kind of tenderness in them.

They're going to be honest, too. "**Honesty**" We've got to be honest. Can you imagine being in a relationship and you're dishonest? We've got to be honest with Jesus to become a believer. We have to be honest with our friends. I'm not talking about honesty in a brutal way. I'm talking about speaking the truth, the Bible says, in love.

The right they love you and they love me enough to speak the truth in love to us. Do you have friends like that? Are you listening to people like that? Maybe it's time to move away from the wrong they and go to the right they. But the wrong they want to keep you in the fray. The right they will keep you above the fray. They're honest and they'll keep you honest.

The right they are also encouraging. "**Encouraging**" I want to be around encouraging people. Don't you? I don't want to be around doggie downer people. "Oh, the glass is half empty. I don't know if we can do it. I'm not sure; that wall is so big. I don't think I can do it. I don't know, you know." Man, I don't have time to hang around with people like that.

The right they encourage me and they encourage you. They put courage in our lives. They're positive. They're uplifting. "You can do it. You can make it! You've got what it takes. I'm proud of you." I think about Mandy and Randy Hood. I think about Susan Holmes. I think about Don McCoy. I think about so many others. People who are true encouragers. People who, when you're in their presence just a minute or two, you feel better because they encourage you. I think about the staff of this church. You'd be hard pressed to find a more encouraging group of people. They encourage so many of you, and they encourage me.

The sway of they. Are you listening to the wrong they or the right they? What did they influence you to do that you would not have done if they hadn't been around? The right they are not going to be perfect people, they're going to be people that have "He" in the middle. They're going to be people who, when they speak, you hear the voice of Christ.

In fact, I want you to hear this song by Casting Crowns called "The Voice of Truth." It's all about the sway of they. It's about the many voices out there and yet one voice calls out with truth. The truth about you, about your life, about our mission together. Listen carefully. **[SONG: The Voice of Truth]**

Listen to the voice of truth. Listen to the right they. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Ed Young, Senior Pastor of Fellowship Church in Grapevine, TX for his resources in this message.